

Community colleges enjoying a big jump in enrollment

**TREND BEGAN IN 2008
AND IS CONTINUING**

By Justin Pope
Associated Press

More young Americans than ever are in college — especially community college, according to a new report.

A record high of about 11.5 million Americans ages 18 to 24, or nearly 40 percent, attended college in October 2008, according to a study of census data released Thursday by the Pew Research Center. Virtually all the increase of 300,000 students over the previous year came at two-year

schools; attendance at four-year schools remained flat.

The growth is continuing this year. The American Association of Community Colleges reports that growth rates of 10 percent or higher have been common this fall on many campuses.

Overall college attendance has gone up for about 30 years; what's new is the sharp uptick at community colleges, driven in large part by recessionary bargain-hunting and closer ties between two- and four-year colleges that give students more confidence that they'll be able to transfer.

As a broader range of traditional-age college students choose a community college, "it doesn't have the stigma it once did," said Mike Grace, 24, a student at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, N.C.

The economic advantages of at least starting a degree at a community college have widened as prices at four-year colleges have shot up. Average tuition and fees at public two-year colleges ran \$2,372 this year, according to a study released last week by the College Board, compared with \$7,020 at public four-year colleges